THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMALA SINHA): (a) Over the past several years the United States and Russia have been coordinating their efforts to check the proliferation in weapons grade nuclear material. The present agreement seeks to terminate production of plutonium at three sites in Russia thus contributing to the advancement of US-Russia non-proliferation objectives. This agreement is not expected to have an adverse effect on India's nuclear capability.

(b) Government remains fully committed to safeguard the country's security against all eventualities. Government considers a robust and viable nuclear option essential for our national security. As such India will not accept any constraints its nuclear option as long as other countries remain unwilling to accept an obligation to eliminate their nuclear weapons within a time bound framework.

Visit of US Assistant Secretary of State to New Delhi

946. SHRI SUSHIL KUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:
SHRI RAJUBHAI A. PARMAR:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) Whether an American team led by the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State visited New Delhi in the first week of September, 1997 on the eve of Prime Minister's visit to the U.S.;

(b) if so, the issues discussed with the team and the outcome thereof; and

(c) whether it was considered by Government as an exercise of controlling the damage done by Ms. Robin Raphel, his predecessor in office and also as a measure to improve relations after sorting out the problems arising from end of the cold war?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMALA SINHA): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) and (c) This was the First visit to India by the new US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian Affairs after his appointment. It was therefore in the nature of an area-orientation visit. In meetings in India, he expressed the keen interest of the new US Administration in improving relations with India and providing a thrust to bilateral cooperation. Issues like cooperation in law-enforcement, science and technology, economic and commercial links, environment and terrorism were discussed in detail during this visit.

Cross-Border firing on Kashmir Borders

947. SHRI SUSHILKUMAR SAMBHAJIRAO SHINDE:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:

Will the PRIME MINISTER be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that while Pakistan was talking of peace and friendly relations with India, cross-border firing and shelling on Kashmir borders including LOC and militancy perpetrated by Pak-agencies backed by ISI of Pakistan were accentuated during and on the eve of the recent Foreign Secretary level talks and the talks between the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan held in New York during recent UN General Assembly Session; and

(b) if so, the details of such incidents during the past four months, indicating the number of persons, civilians, including women and children and militants and security personnel killed on both sides?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRIMATI KAMALA SINHA): (a) and (b) Pakistan's support to cross-border terrorism and its unprovoked firings along the Line of Control and the International Boundary in Jammu and Kashmir continue.